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## THE ALSACE-LORRAINE QUESTION

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WHEN by the Treaty of Frankfurt of May 10, 1871, France was forced to cede Alsace and Lorraine to Germany there was created one of the most difficult and most permanent problems of international relations. This question has remained one of the most active sources of international friction. It lies at the basis of the Triple Alliance, and of the counter alliances, the Dual Alliance between France and Russia, and the Triple Entente. It has been the cause of crushing competitive armaments. It was the cause of constant ill-feeling on the part of France toward Germany, and led to frequent friction between the two countries. In spite of Germany's having affirmed all along that the Alsace-Lorraine question was closed by the Treaty of Frankfurt, it has ever been on her mind. This is a question that concerns not only France and Germany, but it is of moment to every civilized nation.

### FROM CÆSAR TO BISMARCK. ALSACE-LORRAINE BEFORE 1871

France and Germany both have historic claims to these provinces; it is well therefore to consider the history of them previous to 1871. The earliest record of these lands dates from the time of Julius Cæsar, when they formed a part of Gaul. When the Germans invaded the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries they overran and conquered Alsace and Lorraine. Until 870 these lands were controlled by the Merovingian and Carolingian Franks. When the Empire of Charles the Great was finally divided by the Treaty of Mersen in 870, Alsace and Lorraine became a part of the German Kingdom. To this time these two provinces had had a common history; but now they were divided and until 1871 had a separate history. Lorraine became a duchy with an independent existence in Germany, and Alsace became a duchy attached to Suabia. Both regions were German-speaking.

In 1552 France, for the aid she rendered to the German Protestants against Charles V., was given as fiefs of the German Empire the three bishoprics of Metz, Toul and Verdun; and by 1648 at the close of the Thirty Years' War France was given

these three bishoprics in full sovereignty; they ceased to be a part of Germany. They were geographically a part of the

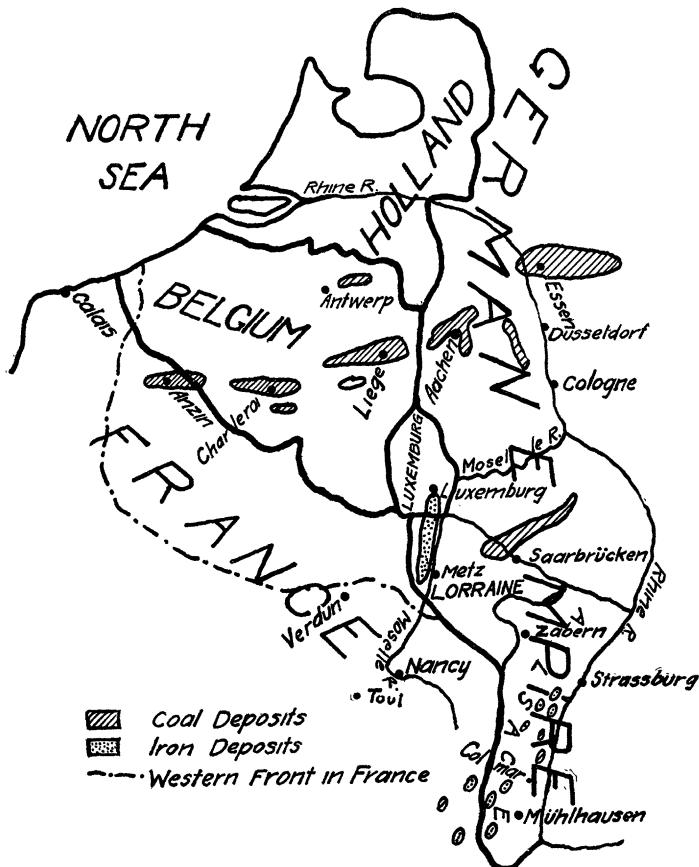


FIG. 1.

Duchy of Lorraine, but were independent of it, and were now a part of France. In 1648 France was also given Alsace as a reward for her services in the Thirty Years' War. Some added territories, Colmar and Strassburg, were secured by the French "courts of reunion," and in 1697 by the Treaty of Ryswick French possession of these was confirmed. Lorraine was in 1737 transferred to Stanislaus Lesczinska when he had lost his kingdom of Poland. He was father-in-law of Louis XV., and in 1766, upon the death of Stanislaus, the Duchy of Lorraine came into the possession of France. So by 1648 and 1766 Alsace and Lorraine, which had been separated from France since the ninth century, once more became a part of France.

Whatever attempts France made to assimilate these German-speaking people previous to the French Revolution were not

very successful. It was the French Revolution that aroused in the Alsace-Lorrainers a French sentiment. The democratic and liberal phases of the Revolution appealed to them; the republican principles fascinated them, and many Alsace-Lorrainers fought in the French wars in the armies of the Republic and Napoleon. It is regarded as significant that the "Marseillaise" was first rendered by Rouget de Lisle in 1792 at a dinner given by the French mayor of Strassburg.

Ever since 1815 the Alsace-Lorrainers have been largely French. In 1871 they were handed over to the German Empire much against their will, and when the French National Assembly ceded these provinces to the victorious enemy, the deputies from Alsace-Lorraine protested against this cruel separation from the mother country, and they were expressing the feelings of the greater part of the people of the ceded territories. When, in 1874, the fifteen deputies from Alsace-Lorraine took their seats in the Imperial Reichstag in Berlin, they also protested against the annexation of their lands by Germany. It is also interesting to observe that in 1871 the two great socialist leaders of Germany, Bebel and Liebknecht, father of Carl Liebknecht, protested against the annexation, and were imprisoned for their boldness.

#### WHY GERMANY ANNEXED ALSACE-LORRAINE

Germany annexed these lands for three reasons: (1) For linguistic and historic reasons. The Germans claimed that these provinces had been taken from Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and now these brothers were to be brought back into the fold and allowed to become Germans again. In the literature of Germany's political aspirations long before 1871 there were references and allusions to the need of regaining these lost provinces.

(2) For strategic reasons. Von Moltke persuaded Bismarck that these provinces were necessary for Germany's defense against France. The Vosges Mountains would be a far more satisfactory frontier from the military standpoint than the Rhine. Ever since then the Germans have claimed that the Vosges Mountains are the natural boundary between France and Germany.

(3) For economic reasons. Alsace-Lorraine contains much coal, iron and other minerals. But the German desire for these deposits was by no means as great in 1871 as it has become since that time.

Of all the reasons the military reason for annexation was  
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the most potent. Germany needed Alsace-Lorraine for purposes of defense, and the people of the annexed provinces were to be regarded as conquered dependents; they were to be kept in subjection at all costs.

### THE ÉMIGRÉS AND IMMIGRANTS

When Germany signed the Treaty of Frankfurt she agreed to allow all inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine that wished to emigrate to do so by October 1, 1872. By that date 60,000 had left the country, all going to France or the French colony of Algeria. 100,000 others were not allowed to go because they had not departed by the prescribed date. But emigration has continued all along, from 5,000 to 12,000 leaving annually, and one French authority states that fully half a million people emigrated from the provinces between 1871 and 1910. Many of the people who emigrated did so because they did not wish their sons to enlist in the German army and later kill their relatives and friends in France. The 100,000 that were not allowed to emigrate in 1872 claimed the rights of foreigners, namely freedom from military service. But the German government refused to grant this concession, and this led to much emigration. Ambitious Alsace-Lorrainers wishing to pursue a military career will go to France, for in the German army they would have very little chance of promotion. In 1914 there were only three Alsatian officers in the German army, while there were thirty generals of Alsatian stock in the French army. In 1900-1913 over 22,000 boys fled from Alsace-Lorraine to enlist in the Foreign Legion of the French army.<sup>1</sup>

To take the place of the Alsace-Lorrainers that went to France Germany sent many colonists or immigrants into the conquered provinces. They were people in all the walks of life, and in 1914 out of 1,800,000 inhabitants, 400,000 were immigrants from various parts of Germany. They did the very things that would make them unpopular with the native inhabitants; they boasted of Germany's greatness, emphasized German superiority and tenaciously adhered to all their German characteristics, which increased the difficulty of reconciling the two peoples.

### GOVERNMENT OF ALSACE-LORRAINE SINCE 1871

When Germany had acquired Alsace-Lorraine it was thought best not to annex the provinces to any one of the German states, for then some of the German states would have felt that they

<sup>1</sup> Gibbons, "New Map of Europe," 16.

had fought in the Franco-Prussian War so that Prussia, or Baden or Württemberg could gather in the spoils. Bismarck felt that it would be the wise thing to make Alsace-Lorraine an imperial land—"Reichsland"—directly under the control of the Empire. That would make all the states equally responsible for the annexation and for keeping the spoils of war.

Previous to 1911 Alsace-Lorraine was not a member of the German Federation. For forty years it was a mere dependency, an imperial territory. Administrative affairs were conducted by the Emperor, the Chancellor and the Bundesrath. There was a representative of the Emperor, the governor-general, situated at Strassburg. In 1874 a territorial committee or "Landesausschuss" was created; its members were elected by the city councils of the four largest cities. At first the committee could merely give advice concerning local laws and taxation. By 1877 it could enact laws concerning local affairs; but these laws had to have the sanction of the Bundesrath, in which Alsace-Lorraine had no representation until 1911. Not all laws were made this way. Some were enacted by the Reichstag, the Bundesrath and the Emperor in the same way that all imperial laws were enacted. Moreover, the Emperor and Bundesrath could issue ordinances having the force of law; the governor-general was responsible only to the Emperor; he was virtually a dictator. Alsace-Lorraine was wholly ruled by outsiders. From 1879 to 1887 an effort was made to establish a mild rule for the conquered lands, but then this policy gave way to a rule of harshness, which merely intensified the prevailing dislike for Prussia.

In 1873 Alsace and Lorraine were allowed to send fifteen members to the Reichstag; but here they could exercise little influence, since that body is of little consequence, the real ruler of Germany being the Bundesrath, in which Alsace-Lorraine was not represented. From the beginning there has been a growing party that demanded local autonomy. As a result of the agitation by this party the imperial government in 1911 granted Alsace-Lorraine a constitution. Alsace-Lorraine could now send three delegates to the Bundesrath; but these were to be appointed by the governor-general, an instrument of the Prussian King. This merely meant that the strength of Prussia would be increased by three votes in the Bundesrath, and therefore it was provided that whenever Prussia by means of these three votes has a majority these votes were not to count. Plainly this kind of an arrangement would not satisfy the demands of those that wished Alsace-Lorraine to be represented on an equality with the other states of Germany.

This bill of 1911 also provided for changes in the local government of Alsace-Lorraine. Instead of the "Landesausschuss" there was to be a bicameral legislature of 36 and 60 members. Half of the 36 members of the upper chamber were to be appointed by the Emperor, the remainder were to be office-holders and representatives of chambers of commerce and other professional and business institutions. The lower chamber of 60 was to be elected by manhood suffrage by secret ballot. But this constitution has not satisfied the people. The Emperor can still refuse to sanction the laws of the local legislature, and the Alsace-Lorrainers have no power in selecting the three members of the Bundesrath. The Alsace-Lorrainers before 1914 wished to have local autonomy, their own sovereign or their own republic, and unqualified representation in the Bundesrath of the Empire.

#### THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

It is difficult to secure adequate information concerning linguistic conditions in Alsace-Lorraine; statistics and opinions differ. The French maintain that the language of the lost provinces is still French. The Germans officially state that the language is preponderantly German, and what French is spoken is largely *patois*. However, one is safe in saying that on the whole Alsace is more German than Lorraine. Even in Alsace the large cities, Mühlhausen, Colmar and Strassburg, are French. The city of Metz in Lorraine is more French than any place in the two provinces, though in a standard German encyclopædia it is stated that only forty per cent. of the population of Metz speak French.<sup>2</sup> In this same work<sup>3</sup> is a map indicating the linguistic dividing line between the French- and German-speaking regions. This represents as French-speaking fully two fifths of Lorraine, and only small indentations on the French border of Alsace are indicated as French. Whatever the official statistics, the facts are that Alsace-Lorraine is not German from the German standpoint. French is still widely spoken; many newspapers are printed with both French and German on the same page; in the shops one is waited on with equal courtesy when speaking French or German. Although the street signs are in German, many of the people always refer to them in French. French plays are presented as often as the law allows, once in two weeks. The German government permits no new French business signs to be put up over the

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, *Konversationslexikon*, 6th edit., Vol. 5, p. 726.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 726-7.

stores. Therefore, old French signs, no matter how old and dilapidated, are still kept over the shops. If the owners tried to repaint the signs that would be equivalent to a new sign and would therefore need to be in German. If you ask an Alsatian whether Alsace is still French, he will answer: "It is not German yet."

#### THE TREATMENT THAT HURTS

On the whole the Germans have done little to conciliate and placate the people of Alsace-Lorraine. They have regarded these provinces as conquered lands and have treated the people in the very ways that would be designed to intensify the existing spirit of protest and opposition. The regulations are all of the petty and annoying kind. For asking an orchestra to play the "Marseillaise," or whistling it, the people are expelled or punished. When French veterans of 1870-1871 get together and talk over old times their meetings are dispersed and their guns taken from them on the ground that the guns are being carried without the veterans having secured licenses. Those Alsace-Lorrainers that left the country at the time of its cession may visit it only three weeks in the year. If they neglect to secure the required police certificates they must leave at once. Those that come back on business trips may see their clients only at the railway station; they may not enter the town. Parents are not allowed to send their children to foreign schools without governmental sanction, and this is granted sparingly. If the children are sent without governmental sanction the parents are liable to fine and imprisonment. In this way it is hoped to prevent the children from learning French, but this regulation seems to heighten the desire to acquire the language.

Only certain French newspapers are allowed to be brought into the country—those that have agreed to omit all reference to Alsace-Lorraine. But people living on the border of France drive over into France, buy the prohibited papers and the women of the party secrete them in specially contrived pockets in their petticoats. The Germans have levied a high tariff on many French goods entering Alsace-Lorraine. Young men leaving Alsace-Lorraine to avoid German military service may never return until they are forty-five. If detected they must pay a heavy fine. This means that unless the parents of such young men have ample means for travel into France they may not ever see their sons again. Even if able to travel, they must get the consent of the German government before they are allowed to leave. French conscripts from Alsace-Lorraine are sent as far as possible from home. If they get sick or die their

relatives can seldom reach them. During the fall maneuvers the people of Alsace-Lorraine must lodge and cook for as many soldiers as the government requires. At various times the manufacturers and merchants of Alsace have been carefully watched by informers to detect any pro-French leanings. When detected they are made to feel the full displeasure of the government. At Grafenstaden, near Strassburg, there is a great locomotive works that had for a long time supplied the railroads of the vicinity with locomotives. One of the directors of the company was a French enthusiast who made no attempt to conceal his sympathies. Suddenly the company was notified that unless it discharged that man it would secure no more orders from the government, and the company had to yield.

All of these circumstances explain why the Prussians are hated. They make it possible to understand the following incident. At Colmar a school teacher was describing vividly the cruelties of Alexander the Great when dealing with the inhabitants of a captured city in Asia Minor. A little girl in the class exclaimed, to the mortification of the teacher: "Surely he was a Prussian!"

One of the most striking outrages of German rule in Alsace-Lorraine was the Zabern or Saverne affair in 1913. At the barrack town of Zabern in Alsace a twenty-year-old lieutenant did various irritating things while in charge of his men. He made uncomplimentary remarks to his men about the Alsatians, he showed open contempt for the civilians. When the populace heard about these things they stoned his house and made annoying remarks to him when on the street. One thing led to another until finally a crowd was dispersed by the young lieutenant and his men, and he himself struck a lame shoemaker with his sword, inflicting an ugly wound on the forehead. Instead of being adequately punished the lieutenant was given the minimum sentence, forty days in jail. The German government did nothing to show that the military had been in the wrong; the protests in the Reichstag were unheeded. The whole affair indicated that the Prussian military government was absolutely dominant, that the civil population in all Germany had no rights as against the military, and it indicated especially that there was not the least inclination on the part of the imperial government to show a conciliating attitude toward the Alsatians. Whatever the German government had succeeded in achieving in the way of placating the conquered provinces was undone in a few weeks by the Zabern affair.

## EDUCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

However, not all of Germany's acts have been of the brutal, domineering nature. She has done much to promote the material, educational and religious condition of the people. Alsace-Lorraine has become a very important industrial center of the Empire; the iron and coal mines are the richest in the Empire, as will be shown later; the population has increased by 300,000 in spite of the emigration of several hundred thousand. Canals have been constructed; a splendid system of railways has been created; sanitation of the most modern type has been established. A splendid school system has been introduced; when these provinces fell into German hands education was not compulsory and was largely in the control of the Catholic Church. Now the same high type of schools prevails as will be found elsewhere in Germany.<sup>4</sup> Many of these benefits would have accrued to these provinces if they had remained in the possession of France, for in industry, transportation, sanitation, commerce and education France has also made much progress since 1871. But undoubtedly the greatest advantage that Alsace-Lorraine derives from her connection with Germany is of an economic nature, and the economic aspects of the question will be considered below.

## THE VARIOUS VIEWS AS TO A SETTLEMENT. THE GERMAN VIEW

The Pan-Germanists maintain that Germany conquered these lands and was given them by the Treaty of Frankfurt. France has no rights in these provinces. The people of these territories have only the rights that Germany sees fit to give them. Whatever happens in Alsace-Lorraine is no concern of France. By international law the rights and interests of France ceased in 1871 by the Treaty of Frankfurt. The Germans declare that for years France had tried to suppress the German language and customs in these territories, and it is now the right and duty of the Empire to wean the Alsace-Lorrainers away from French culture and instil German culture once more. Napoleon III. began the Franco-Prussian war in order to gain the Rhine provinces of Germany for France. The Pan-Germanists say that Alsace-Lorraine was taken to prevent a repetition of such an attempt of France. Germany must keep her western boundary as it is. Military necessity demands it.

This is the view that is held by most Germans. To advocate other measures would be about as unpopular as it would

<sup>4</sup> Sir Harry H. Johnston, "Germany and Alsace-Lorraine," *Nineteenth Century and After*, 75: 40-41.

be for Americans to advocate our giving up Porto Rico, the Philippines or the Canal Zone; however, Maximilian Harden, the courageous editor of *Die Zukunft*, and some others, favor the granting of full autonomy, with certain rights in choosing a monarch.

#### THE FRENCH VIEW

Officially the French have never given up the hope of reconquering the lost provinces. Every year since 1871 a formal ceremony has occurred in which a wreath is placed on the Strassburg Monument in the Place de la Concorde in Paris, and the statue of Strassburg is constantly kept veiled in black to remind the French of the country's bereavement. However, among the second generation especially, this ceremony has had less meaning than for the older generation. After the Franco-Prussian War Bismarck did his utmost to divert the French from thoughts of revenge. By 1881 he had succeeded in directing France into the field of colonial expansion. France added Tunis and other African lands to her colonial possessions. She took a new interest in strengthening her political and commercial power in her dependencies in India, Indo-China, Madagascar and elsewhere. She became, next to Great Britain, the greatest colonial power in the world. Under these circumstances French ardor for reconquering Alsace-Lorraine was, in a measure, allowed to cool off. But the interference of Germany in Morocco in 1905 in the Tangier affair indicated to the French that Germany had broken the tacit agreement of Bismarck. If Germany were going to interfere in French colonial enterprises, that automatically opened the Alsace-Lorraine question again. The French newspapers have all along done their share toward keeping up an agitation for the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine, and they have done all they could to kindle a feeling for France in the hearts of the Alsace-Lorrainers. But there seems to be no evidence that there was a hearty response. Let me quote some typical statements:

The writer, who had good opportunities of getting acquainted with the "Imperial Land" and its people in the decade preceding the European war, must share the opinion of those observers who were not able to find much real enthusiasm for France there. That there was much sentimental sympathy for the brilliant nation to the westward, particularly among the wealthier families, cannot be denied. But so far as could be judged, there were not many Alsatians or Lorrainers who would have liked to be French again.

Forty-odd years of separation has not availed to make the inhabitants of the provinces Germans, but they have thoroughly unmade them Frenchmen.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> R. H. Fife, "The German Empire between two Wars (1916)," 230-231.

Before the outbreak of the war in 1914 the Alsace-Lorrainers wished autonomy under German rule. After the outbreak of the war many Alsatians have claimed that they have always wished annexation to France. But Mr. Gibbons states:

This is not true. It would be a lamentable distortion of fact if any such record were to get into a serious history of the period in which we live.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE ALSACE-LORRAINERS' VIEW

Whatever the attitude of the Alsace-Lorrainers since the outbreak of the war, they hoped for nothing better than autonomy under German rule before 1914. They wished to be as autonomous in directing their local affairs as Bavaria, Baden and Saxony. They are not Germans, neither are they French, they are Alsace-Lorrainers. In a splendid article written before the war, David Starr Jordan summed up the situation thus:

The present attitude of Alsace is concisely summed up in these three lines of current doggerel:

"Français ne peux,  
Prussien ne veux,  
Alsacien suis."<sup>7</sup>

The Alsace-Lorrainers value the prosperity that has come to them through being ruled by Germany. If they had been allowed to vote on their remaining with Germany with autonomy or returning as departments to France, they would have voted for the former. But this does not mean that they have any sympathy for imperial aggrandizement as advocated by the Pan-Germanists. They consider themselves as Alsace-Lorrainers, and wish to be left alone. Their slogan is: "Alsace-Lorraine for the Alsace-Lorrainers."

These are the views of the three parties concerned. It has often been suggested by outsiders during the last three years that the settlement of the question should be left to the vote of the Alsace-Lorrainers. It may be that now, instead of voting for autonomy under Germany, they would vote for annexation to France. But this method of solving the question would satisfy neither France nor Germany. France distrusts Germany; she would manipulate the election. Moreover, there would be no provision for the suffrage of those that emigrated, and they are vitally concerned too. If allowed to vote they would turn the election in favor of annexation to France. The Germans

<sup>6</sup> "New Map of Europe" (1914), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> "Alsace-Lorraine: a Study of Conquest," *Atlantic Monthly*, 113 (1914); 282-287.

would never be willing under the present circumstances to submit the question to a plebiscite. If applied here it would also be applied with justice to Schleswig and Posen. Moreover, the importance of Alsace-Lorraine industrially makes the matter one for settlement by other means. This is a question of national honor to both Germany and France; hence neither would be willing to submit it to a vote of the people.

### THE ECONOMIC BEARINGS

While Alsace-Lorraine was annexed partially for economic reasons, to-day the Germans desire to keep it for economic reasons of much greater potency than those of 1871. In 1871 it was known that Alsace-Lorraine had coal and iron. But the iron ore was of the kind called *minette*, which contains two per cent. phosphorus; this amount of phosphorus was too large to make it feasible to use the ore. However, in 1878 two Englishmen, Thomas and Gilchrist, invented a modification of the Bessemer process that removed phosphorus from the ore and also produced a slag containing the phosphorus extracted from the ore. This invention benefited Germany greatly. She could now use her hitherto useless iron deposits and use the slag as a fertilizer to enrich the soil at home, and she also exported large quantities of this slag. Germany became a great industrial country. She was particularly well favored by nature. In the Rhine country at Saarbrücken and Essen are rich coal fields, and these are close to the iron mines of Lorraine and Luxemburg. These iron mines are the second largest in the world, those in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan alone being richer. The region between the Moselle and Rhine rivers is the only one in Europe that has both coal and iron close together. In all other cases it is necessary to haul one or the other long distances in order to smelt iron. Owing partly to these circumstances Germany has outdistanced England in the iron industry. In 1914 Germany stood second to the United States in steel output. Before 1871 Germany produced only half a million tons of steel, in 1911 she produced fifteen million tons, and about three fourths of the ore came from Lorraine and Luxemburg. This ore could easily be transported to Saarbrücken and Westphalia, and this fortunate combination of natural resources has produced such new industrial towns as Essen, Elberfeld and Düsseldorf.

In the first weeks of the war Germany took Luxemburg, Belgium and northern France. In Luxemburg she secured the remainder of that rich deposit in northern Lorraine. Belgium

and France have rich coal beds. In the Anzin region in northern France nearly three fourths of the French coal supply was produced previous to 1914. So Germany struck a heavy blow at French industry, and greatly strengthened her own resources for carrying on the war. It is plainly evident that if Germany be allowed to retain any of these conquests—Belgium, northern France, Luxemburg—her industrial and military supremacy would be greatly enhanced. She would not only dominate Europe, but also be able to endanger the position of the United States as the foremost steel producer of the world. It is therefore interesting to us Americans to observe that in the allied countries there is an insistence on Germany's giving up not only Belgium, northern France, and Luxemburg, but Alsace-Lorraine as well, in order that she may be so crippled industrially that she may not be able to continue her militaristic policies.

The Alsace-Lorraine question is to-day not merely a question of patriotism and strategic frontier. There is also the economic aspect that seems more important than the other two. Germany could better afford to yield Alsace-Lorraine from the linguistic and strategic standpoints than from the industrial and commercial standpoint.

It is plainly evident that to-day the Alsace-Lorraine problem is still unsolved. Three things stand out clearly: (1) The annexation of 1871 was unjust from the standpoint of the French nation and the Alsace-Lorrainers themselves. (2) If there is any justice in the annexation Germany has failed to convince the Alsace-Lorrainers of it, and has been unable to instil in them a feeling of loyalty and devotion to the Empire. The Alsace-Lorraine question is still a menace to Germany and to the rest of the world. (3) The economic phases of the question have merely complicated it. No matter how the question is settled there will be an injured party, either France or Germany, and probably the people of Alsace-Lorraine too. If Germany loses Alsace-Lorraine her industrial life will be crippled, and she will have a desire for revenge as France has had. This is an exceedingly knotty problem and will be solved only when there is a new spirit actuating nations in their international intercourse. If we can at the close of this war establish a workable system of international government, supported by a new spirit of international friendship and cooperation, the difficulties of the Alsace-Lorraine question will vanish along with many other questions of international friction that promise to disturb the peace of the world for ages to come.